

The Dark Root -Part 6

by Ludwig

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**Author: **Ludwig

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**Timeline: **Shortly before 5x5/New Moon Rising

Chapter Ten

When Angel finally returned to his office,near the end of the afternoon,he found Cain and his friends just finishing up their meal. The scent indicated that it was chinese food and by the looks of it,it had been delicious. Unfortunatly,eating did not bring him as much pleasure as it did them and sometimes,he missed that. But the thing that really caught his attention was how they were all eating and seemingly enjoying themselves in the company of the first murderer. Then again,he did not look the part in the least to the vampire and nor did he to them,obviously. Willow was talking to him about a spell she and Tara had unsuccessfully attempted while Xander

was trying to get him to talk about his travels. Cain was just sitting there and listening to them with a smile on his face and it was not a forced smile that people put on to be polite. He was appeared to like conversing with the youngsters and Angel felt a little jaleous,all of a sudden. It had taken him years to gain their trust and even then,some of them never felt all that confortable around him. But they were at ease with Cain after just knowing him for less than a day. As all of these thoughts were going through his head,Wesley noticed he was standing there.

"Well,you're finally back! So how did it go?"

"Better than i hoped." the vampire answered. "We shouldn't have any surprise interuptions by the L.A.P.D. tonight."

"Exellent!" declared Cain. "I don't have anything against the police but they do have a knack for sticking their nozes where it does not belong. And usually wind up getting themselves killed in the process."

"Well,as i said,we won't have to worry about that,at least."

"How are we going to proceed?" Buffy asked. "Does any of you know how to find her?"

There was a long silence as everyone looked at Cain expectingly.

"I afraid it won't be that simple," said the later. "As i explained to Willow,she will be hard to track in such a large city. I'm afraid the ball's in her camp for now. We'll have to wait for her to make the next move."

Willow raised her hand to draw the crowd's attention on her.

"Maybe we could do a sort of a trace spell," she proposed. "Since Lilith is your daughter,then we could use some of your blood to trace her exact wereabouts. Its worth a shot."

Cain suddently looked very uneasy.

"Iâ€|don't think thats such a good idea,Willow." he answered,shooting a strange look at Buffy as he did. "I told you i wouldn't work because of the high concentration of vampires in the area. We'll have to find another way."

"But what if we use your crystal charm to amplify the trace spell?" interjected Tara. "With the combination of both the spell and the crystal,i'm sure we couldâ€|"

"I said it won't work so lets drop it!" he interrupted curtly. Tara took a step back and dropped her eyes to the floor.

"Hey!" made Willow. "How about you relax here! She was just trying to help and i think its a good idea. I mean,your crystal does work,right? I've seen it glow earlier and its better than to wait for Lilith to leave a few more bodies for us to trace back to her. You said yourself that time is an issue here so what's the problem?"

"What's that crystal charm you're all talking about?" asked

Cordelia.

"Whatever it is,if it can help us find Lilith than we're certainly gonna give it a try!" stated Angel.

Cain glared at him and sighed.

"Come on,Cain!" Buffy prompted. "Lets see it.!"

The man hesitated for a moment longer,then shook his head and handed the crystal to Willow. It was now glowing with a faint red light.

"I'm telling you its a waste of time," Cain snorted. "The readings of the charm are misled by the presence of vampires nearby."

Buffy walked up to Willow and took the crystal to examin it. The moment she did,its glow became considerably brighter,enough to project shadows on the surrounding walls. Everyone was taked aback by this and the Slayer almost dropped the charm. She handed it back to Willow and the glow imediatly returned to its former intensity.

"What happened?" the young witch asked Buffy. "What did you do to it?"

"Nothing! I just touched it and it started to glow brighter!"

She put a finger on it again and again,its red glow intentified. When she removed it,the glow diminished. She repeated the experiment two more times with the same result each time. The young girls both turned to Cain for an explanation.

"Why is it doing this?" Willow asked. "I thought you said that it was meant to detect vampires orâ€|or member of your family."

Buffy's face was drained of color at hearing this.

"What? What is she talking about,Cain? Is this true?"

Cain stood there silently and returned her gaze.

"While you're at it," Angel added,stepping forward, "why don't you explain to us how you knew Buffy was the Slayer when you saw her yesterday."

The bandana man turned his back to them and looked out a window.

"I really don't think its in anyone's best interest for me to answer that." he said.

"We have a deal,Cain." Wesley reminded him. "You tell us and we help you."

Cain turned to look directly at Buffy.

"Are you certain you want to hear this?" he asked her softly.

The Slayer hesitated a moment,taken aback by the grave expression on his face,but then nodded. Cain came back to sit near them.

"I guess i should start at the begining then. As i told you earlier, Enoch and Lilith were the first vampires. When they entered my home, i understood at once what they had become and tried to kill them both. But, being considerably stronger than i, they over-powered me with ease. They knew that they could not kill me because of my curse. Not that they had anything to fear from it, being already dead and thus, unaffected by the curse. But everytime i die, seven people die in my place and that would diminish their food supply. So instead they locked me up in the city's dungeons and left me there to rot. What happened after that is somewhat unclear to me but from what i was able to piece together, they took over the ruling council of Enoch and turned most of them into vampires. Then, they established themselves as king and queen of the city, with their blasphemous progeny as their court of nobles."

"Their rule of terror lasted for a thousand years, during which they used the city's population as food and as toys for their perverse entertainment. Enoch became the most powerful warrior of the world, with the strength of a hundred men and a mastery of weapons that was unmatched. He defeated entire armies by himself, often entering their keeps shortly after dusk and leaving it before dawn with no one left alive. Lilith, on the other hand, spent her time mastering the arts of witchcraft, using the defenseless people of the city in horrible experiments or sacrificing them to elder fiends from the pits of hell. Together, they were virtually unstoppable by any means available to mortals."

"But their reign did come to an end. And not by the hand of man but by the hand of God himself. The Creator watched his creation with great sadness. Everywhere he looked there was wickedness and immoralities as man committed horrible crimes against man. So God decided to drown the world and cleanse it of its evils, sparing only the faithful so they could begin anew. I don't know exactly how it happened but from what i was told afterward, a huge tidal wave washed over Enoch and its surrounding landscape. The city was destroyed along with its inhabitants, human and vampire alike, and i was left buried under tons of rocks. It took me months to dig myself out of the city's ruins and by then, the water had long receded. Believing my children to have perished in the cataclysm, i once again retreated to the wilderness, vowing to never again re-enter the world of man."

"What about Noah?" Willow asked. "Did you ever meet him?"

Cain shook his head and smiled.

"The story of Noah is but a parable, Willow. I doubt he ever existed and even if he did, he was probably just one of the many survivors of the great flood. The idea that he, his wife and his three sons along with their wives could have fathered the re-birth of the human race is ridiculous."

"Why not?" asked Xander. "You claim that were all born of only two peoples. Why couldn't eight of them have accomplished the same? And what about all the animals that he saved?"

"Noah's generation was no longer endowed with the great longevity of their ancestors. It took my father centuries to bring forth the first humans and it took his children just as long to insure a strong

foothold on the earth for their descendants. No normal human family could have accomplished that. Besides, i have met survivors of the flood that were most certainly not of Noah's lineage. As for the beasts, well, i know for a fact that the entire earth was not covered in water. Many higher terrains were left untouched by the flood and animals, having a strong instinct of preservation, probably sought refuge there until the tides retreated, just as the faithfuls of God did. But back to the story now."

"I spent over a hundred years in the wild, once again living among the animals, avoiding humans as best i could. But, as before, curiosity got the better of me and i travelled among them, keeping to myself this time. I hid my mark from them so they would not be frightened and i marvelled at their accomplishments. But before long, i began hearing stories about a mysterious disease plaguing the people of the areas i visited. Something about men and women dying in their sleep, only to rise from their grave the next night to drink the blood of others. At first, i hoped that it might have been just a superstition but i soon also heard of an immortal witch that killed the men she encountered and enslaved their spirits to her will. Then, i knew that one of children, namely Lilianthas, had survived the great flood."

"Feeling no small amount of guilt and responsibility over this, i took it upon myself to hunt down my daughter's spawns. Unfortunately, i was not much of a warrior, back in those days and while i did kill some of them, i often died in battle as well. And since vampires are immune to my curse, each time it fell on seven innocents instead to pay the price for my failure. Deciding that i had no right to risk the life of seven people whom never did anything to me, i began searching for another way to rid the world of those abominations. I travelled much of the earth, visited many cultures, consulted seers and oracles, looking for an answer. But, in the end, it was the answer that finally found me."

"It came in the form of a coven of seven witches, each from a different part of the world and led by a african woman called Seneah. She told me that they had been brought together by the Powers That Be and instructed to find me. She said that the Powers had crafted a plan to restore hope to humanity in their struggle against vampires. The plan was for me to give each of them a child, through a special ritual that would ensure that each child would be entirely their mother's. Only a small portion of my blood would be passed along to them. Seneah told me that one of those children would grow up to become a champion of the human race, in the fight against the vampire hordes that preyed upon it. She also said that this duty would be forever passed on to their descendants and that each time the warrior was killed, another would rise to take its place."

"Seeing in this the only way to amend, at least in part, for my past mistakes, i agreed and fathered a daughter for every one of the witches. Then, the women counseled me never to seek out my progeny and, without another word, left me there. Some decades later, while traveling through europe, i heard of a young woman, seemingly endowed with superhuman strenght, that was credited by all with having killed several demons of the night. I knew at once that the young woman was most likely one of my offsprings and that the ritual had somehow given her my physical capabilities. With it, she could meet vampires on equal terms, in the darkness they roamed and kill them. And since there had been seven original children, from all over the world, this would insure that as long as there were vampires in the world, there

would always be a champion to fight them. And thus were born the Slayer's bloodlines."

There was a long and awkward silence in the room after Cain had finished with his tale. Everyone was looking at Buffy, who's jaw was still hanging from what she had just heard.

"You?" she finally said in disbelief. "You created the Slayers?"

"Not created no. But they are my descendants, in a way. My blood courses through their and your veins. It is because of this blood that you possess the strength and speed to match a vampire in combat, that you can identify them in human guise simply by looking at them and that wounds you sustain in the night are gone in the morning. My blood passed on all of my gifts to you and to all your kin."

Buffy looked at her own hands, as if to try and confirm the veracity of his claims. The reality he was proposing was just too surreal to her and she found herself unable to accept it. Unable to come to terms with the possibility that this man, who claims to be the first murderer Cain, was in fact not only her ancestor, but also the original source of the Slayer's power.

"Why should I believe a single word you're saying?" she asked the man standing before her. "I mean, here you are, claiming to be the one and only Cain, son of Adam and Eve, which I already find almost impossible to conceive. Then, you go on telling us that vampires made their appearance because of you, which again sounds just a little too far fetched for my taste. And now, to top it all off, you're saying that you're also behind the rise of the Slayers? So my question is this; why should we believe you, huh? What proof do you offer to support your wild claims?"

"None." Cain answered simply.

"None?" asked Wesley. "I think you're gonna have to do a little better than that. I too, like Buffy and I'm sure, everyone else here, have a few reservations about your accounts of history. No offense but how do we even know if you're still human? You could very well be another ancient vampire that acquired the ability to mask his true nature over time. Or it could be that you never were human to begin with. Or, maybe a simpler explanation would be that you're actually a fugitive from a mental institute. As you can see, there are countless ways to explain you're being here and some of the strange things we've seen about you. And unlike what is commonly believed, the watchers do not seek out only the most irrational answers as a matter of course, to explain a strange phenomenon. I'm sorry Cain, if that is your real name, but you're asking us to accept a lot on faith here."

The bandana man sighed and shook his head.

"Actually, I'm not asking you to accept a single thing here, young ones. Our agreement demanded that I relate to you those facts which you have heard here last night and today. Now, whether you chose to believe or reject them is your own affair. I fulfilled my part of our bargain and now, I expect Angel to do the same. I need his help to defeat Lilith and, truth be told, all of your help would also be most welcomed

here. However,i cannot force any of you to give that aid so if you do not intend to assist me,then just say so and i will leave to fight my daughter alone. I've done it once before and i'll do it again,all be it this time,the price will most likely be considerably higher."

Angel stepped forth.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that the last time i fought her,over a thousand years ago,my victory came at the cost of many people's lives. Even with the populations being considerably more scarce back then,the casualties rose in the hundreds. Just imagine what kind of death toll we can expect in a city populated by millions. I shiver just to think about it."

"What victory?" Xander asked. "If you beat her a thousands years ago,how come she's still around?"

Cain looked over at Buffy and Wesley.

"That was actually the final part of my story." he answered the young man. "Are you at all interested at hearing it?"

Both the Slayer and the former watcher looked at one another and sat down to listen. Satisfied at their compliance,Cain continued.

"Well,after i witnessed the Slayer in action,i felt confident that humanity could now stand its ground to the vampires and so i returned to my beloved wilderness. But then,centuries later,i received alarming news about the massing of a powerfull army that was apparantly bent on tracking down and capturing Slayers. I shortly discovered that this army was in fact made up of legions of animated corpses,captained by vampires and all under the leadership of Lilith herself. She had discovered the existance to the Slayers and sought to wipe them all out. The army would capture the Slayer,often before she was even ready to face her destiny,and would bring her to the lair of their queen. There,the young Slayer,being no match against the Dark Root,was slowly tortured to her gruesome death by Lilith. It is said that the torment of some of them lasted for years at a time. If this had continued,the bloodlines would have been erased from existance within a century."

"So,once again,i had to take action. I spent decades mastering the arts of combat and warfare,perfecting every technique i was taught to peek efficiency. During that time,i also researched countless mystical arts and studied under witches ans shamans from many parts of the world to learn their secrets. Once i felt confident in my ability to vanquish her,i proceded assemble an army from the villagers and peasants that had suffered the depredations of vampires for too long allready. In every regions we visited,our ranks would be swelled with more volunteers,eager to avenge a fallen loved one until our number rose in the tens of thousands. By the time we entered the eastern europeen plains,we were more than ready. And so,we began to march towards the undead army that was camped two days north of our position and reached them on the last day of the second century."

"We engaged them shortly before dusk,as they were getting ready to move. The battle that ensued was fierce and many brave men lost their lives in the onslaught. But we outnumbered them almost three to one and all of the men were driven by a fury that would have put a demon lord in retreat. When the sun rose the next day,the plains were littered with broken corpses. While we had lost almost half of our troops,the undead legions were crushed and we were victorious. Unfortunately,Lilith had fled the battlefield when she saw defeat looming over the horizon and my men were too exausted from their ordeal to pursue her. So i ordered them to mop up the remaining fiends and then to return home to their lives. With that last command,i left them on the battlefield and began my centuries long search for my daughter."

"For decades at a time,i searched for her,tracked her movements,trying to predict where she would strike next. She would lay quiet for years in many different lairs,hidden from sight,only to emerge once again to wreck havoc. But since news travelled much slower in those days,Lilith had always moved on before my arrival. I studied different ways to track her and pinpoint her location but this is a big world,with lots of places to hide from whoever's hunting you. My search for her spanned over six hundreds years and took me to every corner of the globe but with each passing years,i got closer everytime. In the last few years,i would sometimes miss her by a mere few hours,as opposed to months in prior centuries. And finally,in the middle of the ninth century,i caught up with her."

"It happened in a monastary,near a small village in the Daimao mountains of the Fujian province in China. Lilith had arrived there to seek refuge just before dawn. She was planning to wait there until nightfall,at which point she would enter the chinese sea to cross the pacific ocean,in order to get here,in america. A thousand years ago,this continent was scarcly populated and i would have lost her trace for good. But fortunately,i was hot on her trail and reached the monastary barely an hour after she did. My daughter had allready killed the monks living there and was likely reserving a similar fate to the villagers. When i entered the building,we imediatly felt each other and it did take me long to find her in the crypts of the monastary. As soon as we fell in one another's sight,we engaged in mortal combat."

"The fight between us was terrible and shook the mountain to its very fondations. It lasted for only God knows how many hours. We used vicious weapons forged by man and demons alike,called upon earth shaking magic of old,even summoned eldritch creatures from the pit to fight at our sides. During,the battle,i was killed dozens of times,only to rise again and re-enter the fray. This had the unfortunate effect of decimating the nearby village to the last man. But all of it was not in vain,for with each assault,her strenght was wanning a little more. Soon,even her seemingly endless reserves were no longuer enough to keep me at bay. She redouble in fury but it was to no avail,for Lilith had used up almost all of her powers while each new rebirth would refresh my own. At last,after having cornered her,i struck her down with a fatal blow and she fell helpless to my feet."

"Even on the brink of death,she cligned to life with an ancient strenght. I knew i had to end it,once and for all,so she would never hurt anyone ever again. So i knelt beside her,with a stake in my hands,ready to plunge it into her heart. But when i looked in her

eyes,i saw in there the daughter that was once my child and the courage failed me. I could not kill her anymore that i could allow my son to die all those millenias ago. Instead,i resolved to place her in a stone sarcofagus that i surronded with mystic chains. Then i burried it deep in the earth of the crypt and,finally,i left the building to incant the most powerfull spell i knew to call forth an earthquake that burried the monastary and the dead village under tons of rock. Lillianthas,my only daughter,was now trapped beneath the mountain where i hoped she would eventually perish on her own. Then i left her burrial site and never returned there for over a thousand years."

"Seems like it didn't work out quite the way you planned,eh buddy?" Xander said. The ancient man looked at him and,for the first time,the boy saw the exaustion in his eyes. The exaustion of someone that had carried the weight of human sorrow on his brow for most of recorded history. Xander suddently felt very ashamed of his sarcasm and his next comment died on his lips.

"No,it didn't" Cain told him softly. "Somehow,she survived all those years of imprisonment and now she is free again to resume her existence of slaughter. And every drop of blood she spills is on my hands."

Buffy got up again and walked out of the room in silence,towards to stairs leading to the roof of the building. Angel waited for a few moments,and then went after her,leaving Cain with the rest of the scoubies. Willow,Tara and Xander all looked at one another,trying to imagine how hard it was for their friend to hear all of this. Wesley got up as well to make some more coffey and even Cordelia thought it best not to break the profound silence that was now hanging over them.

Chapter Eleven

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Gone at last!

—

Jordan was looking through a crack of the boarded windows of his headquarters to see that the sun had gone down. He was feeling giddy at the thought of the coming bloodbath. Even the bothersome tingling sensation was barely registering with him now. All afternoon long,he had come up with plans after plans to assault their enemie's stronghold. But everytime,he would dismiss it as too complicated or not painfull enough for his would-be victims. He had finally set his mind on one amusing idea which he had instructed to his troops with great care. He had also warned them extensively not to ruin a single part of it and to leave everyone in Angel's lair to him. All they had to do was to insure that none could escape and he had made certain that they all understood the price of failure tonight. And now,it was time to set the plan in motion.

"All right,now." he told his minions. "You all know the part you'll have to play this night. I trust that you will perform to the best of your abilities,for our queen's greatest glory. I know that with all

this fresh blood within your reach,it will be hard to resist the urge to drink but you must nevertheless,for your queen's sakeâ€|and for your own."

Jordan said that last part with a threatening growl that left nothing to the imagination about his intent,should they falter in their task..

"Gonzo,you will remain here with our twelve strongest men to guard the lair and attend Lilith. The rest of you,follow me. Tonight,we wash away the old order and usher in a new age; the age of Lilith,the dreaded new mistress of this world. Long live the queen!"

"Long live the queen!" repeted the vampires as they followed their leader into the night.

Angel found his former girlfriend on the rooftop of the building,standing by the ledge. Her long blond hair was flowing in the wind as she was looking to where the sun had set only minutes ago. She did not even note his approche,lost as she was in her thoughts. Angel caught himself staring at her,finding the young woman even more beautifull under the pinkish glow of the sky. Suddently,he was reminded of why he had left Sunnydale and her. The knowledge that this magnificent creature and her loving nature could never be for him was too much for the vampire to bear. But he chased from his head of such nonsense and cleared his throat to draw her attention. Startled,she turned her head to the intruder but her features softened when she saw him. Buffy returned her gaze to the night sky as Angel came near her.

"Do you ever think about destiny,Angel?" she asked absentmindedly.

The vampire pondered on his answer for a moment.

"I prefer not to,actually. Whatever i'm destined for,i probably won't like it but since its gonna happen anyway,thinking about it doesn't really help. To answer your question,no i dont."

She turned to look at him and smiled.

"I suppose you're right at that. The same should go for me,being the Slayer and thus fated not to live past twenty five. And yet,i always found confort in the belief that all of this," she continued while waiving her hands all around her "was part of a great and wonderfull plan. True,there is dakness in the world,but there is also light and it is my sacred task to preserve that light. Protect it from those who would extinguish it forever. I believed that it is all the will of God,somehow,and that i was His Chosen one,to carry out that will. And that felt good,here." she added,pointing to her heart.

"So whats changed here?" the vampire asked.

"Whats changed?! Everything! I'm not the instrument of God. I'm just a beast of burden,bred by man to be used as a dog of war against vampires. Just the desperate attempt of a selfish,evil man to cleanse his consience,soiled with the blood of so many. Do you have any idea how much knowing this belittles me? I may spend the rest of my life

cursing the day i ever met him."

"So i take it you believe him,then."

"What other choices do i have? As incredible as his tale is to my ears,it somehow feels right here." she said,pointing to her heart again. "And for all my head wracking,i can't think of a reason why anyone would wanna make such a story up."

"Same here." added the vampire with a smile. "The infamous Cain. I gotta say i was not expecting that one when i got out of bed yesterday morning. I never thought i'd ever meet the legendary Dark Root,let alone her father. Must be my lucky week."

The young Slayer snorted at the comment.

"Try not to seem so pleased with yourself. I could have gone the rest of my life without ever hearing of either you know. And besides,of all people,i thought you'd be the one to hate him the most. Its because of him if you're a vampire now,you know."

Angel frowned,visibly surprised at her statement.

"What? You think that he is to blame for whatever ills happened to our lives?"

"Don't you?" Buffy retorted.

"No. Not in the least. If there's one thing i learned over time,its that we each make our own destiny. He did not make me into a vampire,Darla did. And she did not have to do much of a sell job on me either because i was quite far from righteousness even as a mortal. Maybe his actions brought about the birth of vampires on the world but do you really think that was his intent?"

"Perhaps it wasn't but he said it himself; he did not care about the consequences of his actions." stated Buffy. "So that doesn't make him any less guilty for it,as far as i'm concerned."

The vampire sighed.

"Buffy,i never had any childrenâ€|not in the normal sense anyway. But i've seen enough folly committed in the name of a parent's love for his child to venture a guess as to what went through his mind the day he opened his veins to make his dying son drink of his blood. Desperation can push the best of people to commit the worst of crimes,in some circumstances."

"And what about the murder of his own brother? Was that also a desperate act of love?"

Angel came to stand besides the ledge next to her and looked toward the horizon.

"Buffyâ€|do youâ€|still hold against me the death of Jenny Calender?" he asked hesitantly.

The young Slayer was taken aback by the question. She remembered the charming school teacher whom Giles was quite fond of. The young teacher full of life and blessed with a generous soul that had helped

them on so many occasion. The young teacher that had been brutally murdered by Angelus,Angel's evil self,a little over a year ago.

"No! Of course not! How can you even ask me that? It was not you but Angelus that killed Jenny."

"It was these hands that broke her frail neck,Buffy. It was these lips that smiled as these eyes looked onto her lifeless corpses. And this image is forever engraved in this memory. And i can tell you that Jenny was not the first one to fall prey to Angelus. There were so many others,all of whom i still remember vividly. Yet,you are willing to forgive me all the horrible things i've done,no questions asked. Why?"

"What do you mean,why?" she countered. "Because you're different,thats why. Because you regret the wrongs that you've done and for which you are now trying to make amend. Because you have a conscience."

"And you think he doesn't?" Angel expressed his surprise. "Have you heard anything he said? There's not a single word that wasn't drenched in sorrow and when i look in his eyes,all i see is regret. And believe me,i would know. I've done some really dispicable things in my days,Buffy,and as punishment,i will be haunted by the memory of those deeds for the rest of my life. But my life will eventually come to an end,one way or another and thus,so will my sentence. But his never will and he'll end up spending an eternity of regret for his crime,with no hope of ever knowing peace. Compared to him,i'd say i got off pretty damned light. So do i hate him? No. If anything,i feel sorry for him."

"My my my!!!" made a strange sounding voice coming from behind them. Startled they whirled around,combat ready. In front of them,standing in the middle of the roof,was a most feral looking vampire. He was a tall,thin fellow with short blond hair. Angel almost did not recognized the young vamp that had introduced himself as Jordan the other night. Everything about him was different,including his scent and his voice,all of which the old vampire took as a very bad omen.

"If i had known you two would be doing scenes from 'All My Children',i'd have brought a box of tissues." Jordan snorted sarcastically. "But please,don't let me stop you. I really love that stuff. It makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside."

Angel and Buffy took a combat stance on either side of the intruding vampire,whom did not even blink at their threatening gesture. The Slayer fished a stake out of her coat and waved it menacingly. But Jordan only smiled at her.

"You certainly picked the worst possible time to take a stroll around here,creep!" she told him. "I happen to be in a very staky mood right about now."

"Unless of course you would like to cling to unlife just a little longer,Jordi." Angel intervened. "In which case you better tell us exactly where we can find your queen. Then maybe,just maybe,we'll be inclined to let you leave,provided you agree never to show your ugly face in Los Angeles ever again. What do you say?"

"Mmmmmâ€¦." made Jordan, rubbing his chin. "Let me think here. Tearing you both apart to wear your entrails as a necklace or tucking my tails between my legs and go hide in a sewer? Decisions, decisions. I think i'll go with choice number one. More fun all around."

"Your funeral, pal." growled Buffy.

"No my dearâ€¦ just yours." answered Jordan, charging forward.

"So what do we do now?" asked Xander, waiving his arms.

"What can we do?" said Willow. "If Buffy doesn't want to trust him, thats where it ends."

The young man looked over to Cain, who was sitting apart from them, seemingly staring blankly in front of him.

"Are you two buying into all of thisâ€¦re-write of genesis theory? What if he's just another vamp, like Wesley said? Maybe he's in competition with this Lilith character for the top chair of bloodsuck city and just wants our help to eliminate a rival."

Willow and Tara reflected on the suggestion a moment.

"Nah." The red headed witch said. "I don't think so. He's not a vampire and the reason i know this is because i saw him look out the window earlier, standing right into sunlight. Besides, he really sounds sincere when he says he wants to help. As for him being who he says he is, don't you think it would have been easier to get our trust if he had pretended to be something other than the inventor of murder? I can't think of a single reason why anyone would want to pass for Cain, unless thats who they actually are."

"Ok, so maybe you got a point here but i still say that we shouldâ€¦"

Xander's voice trailed off when he noticed that neither girls were listening to him anymore. Then he heard what had drawn their attentions away from him. It was the sound of several heavy vehicles that seemed to be coming from right outside of Angel's building. The young friends immediately went to the nearest windows to identify the source of the commotion. Outside in the street, they saw a convoy of about half a dozen large moving trucks driving directly toward the building. The vehicles didn't even slow down as they climbed on the sidewalk and rolled along the wall. Xander reflexively grabbed Willow and Tara by a shoulder and pulled them back. They heard the loud whining of metal grinding against brick and the windows were suddenly obscured by one of the trucks that stopped right in front of it, shattering the glass in the process. Then, all was quiet again. Xander walked to the window, careful not to impale his foot on a broken shard of glass. He saw that the vehicle was parked only centimeters from the wall and that the truck's box now blocked the opening completely. Wesley ran to the exit only to see that a truck had blocked the exit as well.

"What the bloody hell is going on here?" he asked, coming back to the group. Cain came to join them and looked at the blocked window.

"I'd say that's fairly obvious." he stated calmly. "Our friend Lilith and her servants just went on the offensive."

"Oh my God! We trapped!" yelled Cordelia in a panic. "They've got us cornered in here."

"Let's remain calm here, Cordelia." said Wesley reassuringly. "We're not trapped at all. Obviously, we can still leave by the sewers under the basement."

"Heuâ€¦not unless oxygen deprivation isn't an issue with you, Wes." Willow said, pointing to the back of the office. The former watcher's eyes followed her finger to the stairs that led to the basement, where he saw large volumes of thick, billowy white smoke coming out. The smoke was already spreading to the rest of the office and within a few minutes, they would all suffocate.

"Mmmmmâ€¦boxe us in and smoke us down." remarked Cain, smiling. "That's smarter than those critters usually get. I'm impressed."

"You know, I'm so glad you find all of this amusing, Cain," shot Xander "but for most of us, dying happens to be a little more final than it is for you."

"What do you want me to do, son? Scream like a girl? Like Wesley said, let's keep our pants on, shall we? All we have to do isâ€¦"

Cain did not finish his sentence and abruptly looked to the ceiling, as if he had sensed something new. His breathing stopped and his eyes widened as they watched him, a reaction that sent a shiver down their collective spines.

"Oh no!" he said, suddenly breaking for stairs leading to the roof. Not sure of the reason for his apparent terror, the Scoobies followed him up nevertheless.

Up on the roof, things were not going well either. Buffy had rarely faced a vampire that gave her such a hard time. According to Angel, this Jordan fellow was a mere fledgling and yet, he was fighting with the deadly skill and power of an ancient master. He was much stronger than she was, already a rare occurrence and he shrugged off blow that would have sent any other vamps flying through the air. He also moved with such speed that she barely had time to see his attacks coming. Only through their concerted effort were they even able to hold their own against this implacable foe. But he was rapidly wearing them down while he, seemed more than able to keep this pace up all night. They had to do something quick, before they were to worn out to keep on fighting.

Buffy attacked him with a series of fast punches and kicks, alternating between modes as randomly as she could, hoping to penetrate his defense long enough to get in a clean strike to his chest with her stake. Meanwhile, Angel did his best to draw off most of Jordan's blows, since his vampire nature would allow him to survive them better. The maneuver finally bore its fruits when Buffy got the opening she had been trying for. She gave him another quick kick to

the face, to distract him further and whirled around, stretching out the stake arm. The weapon found its mark and imbedded itself deep in the vampire's chest, to the young slayer's satisfaction. She took a quick step back to avoid being covered with the dust from the disintegrating vamp but then, the unthinkable happened. Instead of dying, Jordan casually looked down at his chest and removed the stake from his heart.

"What theâ€¦!" Buffy never finished her sentence. Using his foes shock, Jordan jumped in the air and kicked them both in the chest, sending them rolling several meters back. The kick knocked Buffy's wind out of her and nearly passed out then and there. Angel fared a little better and got to his feet right away.

"How come you're still alive?" he asked his opponent. "Buffy didn't miss your black heart."

Jordan laughed evilly and threw the stake over the ledge. He shot a quick glance in the street below where his troops were assembled and cheered him on.

"Fool! Her aim was true indeed but i no longer belong to your lower cast!" he declared. "I am the queen's devoted servant and as such, she empowered me with her gifts so i could bring forth destruction to her enemies! Sadly, that happens to be you, your Slayer bitch and her mongrel friends. Savor the next few moments well, Angel, for they will be your last."

As soon as he said that, Angel charged him again. He attacked with all the fury he could muster from the deepest corners of his soul but it was to no avail. Jordan countered every single one of his attacks with ease and in turn, dealt the older vampire severe bone-crushing blows after bone-crushing blows. Angel made a desperate attempt to push him off the roof in order to buy himself some time to recover but Jordan caught him and lifted him over his head. He then threw Angel back almost ten meters where the vampire landed heavily on the roof. As he did, Buffy got up and ran up to Jordan, jump-kicking him in the back and sending him tumbling to the ground. Enraged, the vamp got back up and attacked the Slayer like a rabied dog.

The roof door opened and Cain emerged, followed closely by Wesley and Xander. They looked around a moment and saw the feral vampire Buffy was fighting. Angel was nowhere in sight and Wesley feared the worst.

"A dark slayer!" Cain said.

"We have to help her!" yelled Xander.

"There's nothing you can do for her." Answered the bandana man. "Get back inside, now!"

"We don't abandon our friends!" declared Wesley as he tried to run past Cain. But as he did the later shoved him back violently into Xander. The two men stumbled back through the door and tumbled down the top flight of stairs. Cain then closed the door and kicked it in further, jamming it shut. Wesley and Xander were mildly stunned but got to their feet nevertheless and ran back up the stairs. Wes tried to open the door but he couldn't make it budge. The two young men banged it with their shoulders but it was no use.

Furhter away on the roof,Jordan dealt a series of brutal punches to Buffy,sending her crashing into the ledge. As she tried to get up,he slapped her across the face and toppled her over the edge of the roof. At the last moment,she caught an iron pipe running the lenght of the wall and kept herself from plummeting to her death in the street below. The vampires in the street were yelling madly,hoping she would fall to them. Jordan looked down at the Slayer and laughed again.

"Hey,pretty boy!" yelled Cain,walking to the middle of the roof. Jordan whirled to look at him. The bandana man quickly fished out a small bottle from his duster and poured the white dust contained therein all around him.

"I remember you from the other night." Jordan hissed. "I ran from you then,afraid of what you represented. But my queen told me all about you,Cain and i no longer fear you. In fact,i was looking forward to meeting you again,to make you pay for interfering in our meal,that night in the alley."

"I've heard those threats before,child,spoken to me by far more dangerous beings than you."

Without another word,the vampire charged him and slammed into an invisible barrier just inches away from Cain. Jordan snarled and smashed his fists into the unseen wall a few more times then snorted.

"Ah! When queen Lilith spoke of you,she forgot to mention you were a cowering dog,hiding behind your parlor tricks."

He stepped back and turned his to Buffy who had just climbed back up on the roof.

"Well,if you won't fight me then,just stay there and watch me kill your new friends."

With that,he ran back toward the Slayer and they resumed their fight. The moment Jordan turned his back,Cain drew his bowie knife and took a small pouch hanging inside his duster. He cut his right palm deeply with the knife and then poured some blood on both side of the blade,covering its entire lenght. When that was done,he opened the pouch and sprinkled some silvery dust onto the blood on the knife and blew on it until it was pasty enough. Cain looked up at Buffy to see she was in trouble. The young woman was doing her damnest just to fend the vampire off and wouldn't last much longer. Then,he saw Angel coming back toward them.

"Angel!" he yelled at the vampire,whom promptly turned to look at him. "Carefull not to touch the blade!"

Then,he threw the knife to Angel,which the later caught by the hilt. He looked down at the bloody weapon than back at Cain and frowned.

"Just cut him up with it!" instructed the old immortal. "Doesn't matter where or how deep,as long as you draw blood!"

The vampire hesitated,unsure of exactly what that was supposed to

accomplish.

"Just do it,you blasted oaf!" ordered Cain.

Deciding that he did not stand to lose anything at this point,Angel complied and turned back to the enemy vampire. And just in time too for he had caught Buffy by the neck and was in the process of strangling her.

"Oh Jordan! Why don't you give her a break and come play with me for a while?"

Jordan looked back at Angel and smiled. He shoved Buffy to the side and turned his whole attention to the old vampire. Then,he noticed the knife Angel was holding and broke into laughter.

"A knife?! Stakes will not kill my so instead you want to attack mw with a knife? Getting a little desperate,are we Angel? But don't worry,my old king. Soon,you won't have anything to feel desperate about."

"You know,Jordi,that threat is just getting scarier and scarier everytime you repeat it."

Suddenly,Jordan leaped forward and lunged with a haymaker that was meant to decapitate Angel in a single blow. But the vampire sidestepped the attack and slashed his opponents arm with Cain's knife. There was a strange hissing sound just as he did and,all of a sudden,the wound burst into flames. Jordan yelled in surprise and jumped back,frantically smothering the fire on his arm until it was extinguished. In its place was left a huge burned gash that was hellishly painfull. Angel looked down at his weapon and his smile broadened.

"Wellâ€¦a little more surprise then you were hoping for,eh Jordi?" he teased the young vamp. "You can still get out of this in one piece,if you tell me what i want to know."

Jordan did not even answer. He screamed like a savage and attacked Angel in a frenzy. But the vampire,using his vast martial arts experience,fought defensively,concentrating on avoiding the wild blows and slashing at his foe everytime an opportunity presented itself. Each time the blade bit flesh,the cut exploded into flames,drawing another scream from Jordan. Soon the young vamp's body was completely immolated and he tumbled to the ground,near the ledge. Angel stepped back,amazed that the blazing vamp was still alive.

"Come on Jordan! Where's Lilith? Tell me,for God's sake and i'll spare you!"

"Noooooo!!!!!" yelled Jordan getting up and charging Angel like a madman. But the vampire was ready. Taking a two-step swing,he sidekicked Jordan in the chest and sent him flying over the ledge.

"My queeeennnn!!!!" he yelled,falling to the street below right in the middle of his vamps. When he hit the ground,his body exploded into a fireball that engulfed the street and set his troops ablaze. The poor vamps rans left and right for a short while like unliving torches and finally disintegrated into dust.

Angel looked down in the street and noted this with satisfaction. He then went to help Buffy to her feet. The young woman was still groggy from the assault but seemed ok.

"You all right?" he asked, worried.

"I'll live. What happened to our friend?"

"Oh. His grand projects all went up in flamesâ€|along with the rest of him."

She rubbed her injured ribs and frowned

"I'll explain later." he added.

"That was nicely done, Angel." said Cain, coming to join them. "I know of very few people that ever survived an encounter with a dark slayer."

"Dark slayer?" repeated Angel.

"Yes. A vampire to whom Lilith give some of her blood. It greatly enhances their strenght and renders them invulnerable to staking. Nasty sort of fellows, they are, but fortunatly they don't last more than a few days. Lilith's blood eats away at them from the inside until they crumble to dust. I also discovered that it makes their blood extremely volatile and, when mixed with my blood along with the right chemicals, prone to bursting into flames. But still, they're very dangerous and defeating one is no mean feat. Congrats."

"Yeah, well it was no thanks to you!" spat Buffy in an angry tone. "What the hell is your problem anyway? Why didn't you help us fight this thing, since you knew so much about it. We almost got killed here."

"I did help you. I gave you the means to kill that critter."

"And you couldn't help us to kill it?" she continued.

"Buffy, a dark slayer is nothing to be trifled with." Cain explained. "It might have killed me, you know."

"So? We face death almost every days of our lives, thanks to you. That thing might have killed us too."

"Yes, it could have. But if you had died, child, you would have died. It would have been sad and tragicâ€|but it would have ended with you. If i had died here, not only you, but your friends downstairs as well, would have died in my place. Tell me exactly how would that have helped you out here."

Buffy said nothing, realizing that he was absolutely right. Had he been killed, they would all be dead now. Remembering her earlier conversation with Angel, she looked into the man's eyesâ€|and finally saw it. The great sadness, the weight of guilt accumulated over thousands of years of existance, and the painfull knowledge that this guilt would never be alleviated. Right at that moment, all the animosity she had been feeling toward him died away. Angel was right; this man was to be pitied more than anything else.

They heard a loud battering noise as the door finally gave way to Xander and Wesley's attempts to break it down. The two young men came onto the roof, along with Cordelia and the two witches. When they saw that everyone was alive and well, they breathed a sigh of relief.

"You know Cain, I don't appreciate being manhandled that way when I'm trying to help those I care for." complained Wesley.

"I'm very sorry Wesley. You're a courageous man and both Buffy and Angel are lucky to count you among their friends. But there was nothing you could have done here, trust me."

"Humpfff!" was Wesley's only reply. Cain turned to Xander.

"Listed, lad. Could you go down in the street in front of the building and collect as much of the ashes you'll find there as you can?"

The boy hesitated a moment but when he saw the look in Cain's eyes, he knew the man was on to something here and did as he was asked.

"What do you need with the vamp's ashes?" Angel asked.

"As I told you, a dark slayer is fed some of Lilith's blood." Cain said. "That means that we might be able to use the slayer's ashes to pinpoint her location with the witches' help."

He turned to the young girls

"Provided of course you still want to help." he told them.

"You bet we do!" answered Willow with a smile.

"Great!" made Buffy, clasping her hands. "Then let's not waste a single moment. We have some major slaying to do and the night is still young!"

TO BE CONCLUDEDâ€¦

End
file.